

CONFLICT AT THE CORE OF SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK

Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract and Foreword

In my thesis, I will explore how creative producers can give relevant, constructive feedback during the development of a screenplay through focusing on the different types of conflict. I will look at conflicts as forces of antagonism; as a way of resonance with audience; as ways of creating tension and how all these are dictated by the chosen premise. Understanding the conflict allows the producer focus their feedback, holding the different visions together and remain helpful, new perspective in script development.

Avainsanat creative producer, script development, conflict, screenplay, tension, premise

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Foreword

It's possible for me to make a bad movie out of a good script, but I can't make a good movie out from a bad one.

George Clooney, American Actor & Producer

1. Introduction

In my thesis, I will explore how creative producers can give relevant, constructive feedback during the development of a screenplay. The literary research centers on how understanding different layers of conflict will help the feedback to stay focused and relevant. I will look at conflict as forces of antagonism in the story, as ways of creating depth for character, considering how conflict allows us audience to identify with the characters, different methods to use conflict to create tension and how all these are dictated by the premise of the story. Drawing from my research on screenwriting manuals, I will illustrate how important it is for a creative producer to research deeper than their naturally built-in understanding of dramatic structure in order to provide insightful feedback regarding the screenplay. However, rather than getting carried away with the terms and ideas that the manuals present – which would demand further research and understanding on how to best master all the aspects covered in them – producers should instead focus their development feedback on the conflict within the screenplay.

1.1 Producer as a collaborator in the screenplay development

What makes a good screenplay? How do you recognize one when it lands on your table? How can we help in the development of the script without muddling the original intent the screenwriter had? A producer must know what it is they are looking for in a screenplay. Furthermore, they should know how to avoid being an uneducated, undeserving producer in the eyes of the creative, whose feedback does not provide valuable insight into developing their script. Producers are often seen as the enemy, the ones who do not appreciate the art of telling stories. This aversion and contempt toward producers is perfectly encapsulated by David Mamet, an American playwright, screenwriter and film

director whose literary works are part of the canon of the education of future film-makers. Mamet writes in his book *On Directing*:

Natural, creative exuberance and self-confidence are wonderful things in an artist. They are inhibited from growing into arrogance not through the content but because of the process of education. Even the minimally serious artist is humbled constantly by the screaming demands of craft.

Those who style themselves “producers” have not had the benefit of any such education, and their arrogance knows no bounds. They are like the white slave owners of old, sitting on their porches with their cooling drinks and going on about the inherent laziness of the Negro race. The “producer,” having never had a run-in with the demands of a craft, sees all ideas as basically equal and his own as first among them, for no reason other than that he has thought of it (1992, pp.48-49).

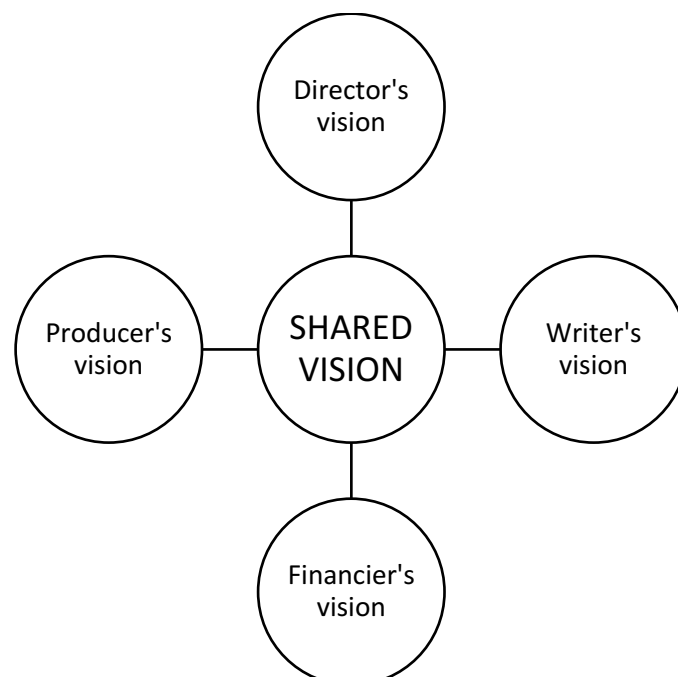
When a renowned film director and academic expresses such a cold sentiment toward producers, it serves to scorn them, locking them into a box that does not accept or recognize them as creative individuals. Spiteful though these words may be, the underlying criticism is valid: how can someone with no artistic education or understanding of the creative process of screenwriting truly grasp the struggle and effort that is creating a screenplay? Such a person — unless they are extremely gifted in the art of storytelling — could not provide valid feedback on how to improve the script. Despite our naturalistic connection to story as human beings, most of us have to hone our understanding of the craft through study and education.

The producer must understand storytelling — and most likely they have a passion for it. The 21st century ideal is the creative producer, as creative producer Sarah Green describes her collaboration with director Terrence Malick in an interview: a film-maker who cares for the stories they tell beyond the practicalities of their chosen specialism, who can be a good editor, see things from a different perspective and address issues before they get to happen (Mentorless, 2016). It would be beneficial for producers to learn the art of screenwriting — however, not all wish to or have the time to master this craft. Alexander Mackendrick, a director and teacher, acknowledged that “a script is never the sole domain of either the writer or director” (2004, p. 66) and that it should serve to connect the diverse languages and purposes the film-makers need it to, mentioning the screenwriter’s importance to connect the director and the performer. But a screenplay serves many more professions than the two mentioned by Mackendrick: in a broader sense, the screenplay

is needed for financing, distribution, marketing and for the production crew. The art of the producer is very different to the art of the director or the screenwriter, yet they all work with one common factor: telling a story through the medium of film and television. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the producer to understand the art of a screenplay, for it is their only blueprint, their only map for making the story they work on come to life.

1.2 Producer as the collective force

The producer is the collective force in the development. They bring together the writer, the director, the financiers and the distributors. Everyone – including the members of the production crew who join in later in the process – will have their own vision of what the story being told is about. To make sure that the producer is able to bring all those visions together and deliver what the financiers and distributors are expecting, the producer must have an understanding of storytelling and work on their skills on bringing all of these visions together in the course of the script's development. The strongest films come from those where the different visions are shared (Edwards & Skerbelis, 2005). The producer plays a key part in making that collaborative process possible. Shared vision can be visualized with the following diagram:



A producer must develop the skill of staying focused in their feedback and guard their writer from too many mixed ideas regarding the screenplay. To keep the rewrites focused, the producer should focus especially on one certain aspect of the screenplay when giving their feedback regarding each new draft: the conflict. This will help their feedback stays relevant throughout the rewrites and does not get muddled. The producer must acknowledge and truly understand the nature, the many layers and the necessity of conflict for a successful screenplay. They have to be able to recognize conflict as Egri says “the heartbeat of all writing” (2004, p. 188) and how to further strengthen it and never in the course of rewrites and their feedback, lose their focus from it.

2. Recognizing layers of conflict

Act I, Act II and Act III. Beginning, middle and end. Set up, confrontation, resolution. Separation, Descent, Initiation, Return. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Aristotle, Syd Field, Christopher Vogler, Blake Snyder and the rest are talking about the one and same thing: the necessity of conflict to dramatic structure. Snyder’s Beat Sheet (2005) helps one to understand what kind of struggles the protagonist might be facing during the course of their story and is useful for only that one and sole purpose: to deepen our understanding of how to create a more viable conflict for the protagonist to overcome. But what is conflict?

2.1 Conflict in Western Narrative

Oxford Living Dictionaries defines conflict as “a serious disagreement or argument,” describing three variants: a continued armed confrontation; a personal experience of opposing feelings and needs; or as an “incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests.”¹ The first gives us a full-on struggle against an easily recognizable opposing force, the protagonist against the antagonist - like the Scotts against the Englishmen, or a mobster against the police. These conflicts often stem from scarcity; of limited resources or an object that cannot be shared, such as the crown for a

¹ Oxford Living Dictionaries. [Online, Accessed 1 November 2018] Available from: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conflict>

kingdom. The second identifies the heart of a three-dimensional character, the need for an inner life: that a fully rounded character is struggling between possibilities within their own character; faced with their own personal flaws; having a contrasting want and need. The third acknowledges the social aspect of conflict, the clashing of ideas or cultures - democracy versus dictatorship, atheism versus faith, rock versus pop, which come from cultural differences, a misunderstanding or the completely different worldviews. Edwards and Skerbelis list in their book about screenplay development a total of seven possible forces of antagonism recognized in Western narratives (2009, p.55):

1. Person against Nature
2. Person against Person
3. Person against Environment
4. Person against Machines/Technology
5. Person against the Supernatural
6. Person against Self
7. Person against God/Religion

The variants of these conflicts offer us endless possibilities of challenging and opposing our protagonist. But this is merely conflict on a level of antagonism. Conflict, or a form of it, can be found on more layers of storytelling than just in the forces of antagonism: conflict can be found in subtext which comes from the juxtaposition of what is said and what is meant; how the audience is led to believe one thing and surprised with another; how, in retrospect, everything included in the story felt necessary for us to be able to understand the outcome. Consistent, focused conflict should be the heart of the screenplay, playing with the levels of intrapersonal and interpersonal, between the characters trusted friends and the ones they believe their enemies, heightening the drama with conflicting surroundings when appropriate and always including the conflict created through subtext. All these elements aim for one single purpose: to engage the audience's attention. The easiest way to get the audience to ask: "What happens next?" is to give them conflict; something that engages them, keeping them uncertain of the outcome. Script developer Lucy Scher explains that a strong conflict allows the audience to process their own experiences and that everything else in a screenplay, its originality or the strength of the characters, is secondary to the convincing central conflict, which according to Scher, is the only thing on which the success of a screenplay depends on

(2011, p.45). Scher's observation combined to the statement an English novelist E. M. Forster made eighty years earlier gives us the two main aspects a creative producer should keep in mind throughout the development of a screenplay.

Story as such can only have one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And conversely it can only have one fault: that of making the audience not want to know what happens next.
(Forster, 1927, cited in Yorke, 2013, p.96)

This relevant breakdown of the nature of effective storytelling sums up what should be the aim of all script development. These two explanations are at the core of all screenwriting manuals. Scher states the necessity of conflict to a successful story, as that is the window that allows the audience to engage with the characters and Forster is describes the importance of tension. Conflict creates tension and tension keep the audience interested. But before opening these two aspects further it is good to consider: why is telling stories and experiencing them through different means so vital to us as individuals and as a community?

2.2 Human as a dramatic being

Scher suggests that there are three reasons for us to engage with the conflict in a story which also explain the three reasons we tell stories at all (2011, p.45):

- Make sense of the world
- Find order in chaos
- Process experience

Her statement is supported by both Mamet and John Yorke, whose book *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* explores the social and singular functions storytelling serves to us. They suggest that telling stories by forming them into a memorable cause-and-effect form is built in to humanity as a coping mechanism — it supports our survival, making it easier to remember and comprehend our surroundings, thus making it a natural urge to dramatize events (Mamet, 2007). On a collective level, myths and stories have helped societies handle the conflicts they face within and outwards, assisting them to solve contradictions and accept and enforce the norms within them (Yorke, 2013). Stories serve as our shared collective memory. So, the telling of

stories in their ancient and more contemporary forms serve the purpose of guiding individuals to working and functioning with each other, developing our ability to empathy, as well as a way of sharing and enforcing common values.

On a more individual level, stories help us to connect with our own fears and desires. Yorke sees stories as a way for us to “bond with our unconscious” (2013, p.5). Scher support this, writing that the function of story is “to help us make sense of our own lives” (2011, p.38). Mamet suggest that through the hero of the story we can learn the important lessons and mysteries of our own souls, using our hero as our avatar while we ourselves stay perfectly safe. He also writes about us finding liberation when being able to experience and accept the fact that we, the audience, live in a savage world where things do not always come even (2007, pp. 18-61). These emotions and themes we wish to explore through stories are, as screenwriter Philip Parker suggests (1999, pp.91-92):

1. The Desire for Justice
2. The Pursuit of Love
3. The Morality of Individuals
4. A Desire for Order
5. The Pursuit of Pleasure
6. A Fear of Death
7. The Fear of the Unknown
8. The Desire for Validation

These themes provide us with an emotional territory that we can recognize in the story, which in turn allows us to feel empathy for our characters. The force of antagonism can be anything – a surrounding society, an individual, a machine, something supernatural or our own self – and we can understand what our protagonist is going through when they fight in these basic themes that humanity share.

Stories, then, are not merely entertainment. They are a way of learning how to behave with ourselves and amongst other human beings in situations that we have not experienced firsthand but have immersed through the lessons taught to us by our protagonists. Now that we know that the stories serve us to comprehend and organize the knowledge we have of the world – educating and preparing us for struggles we might face through

presenting and holding our attention through conflict – how does the storyteller choose through which setting they present the world to us, which lesson in life they wish to convey? For that, we must understand the importance of premise.

3. Premise – Uniting Theme, Character, Conflict and Point of View

The premise has been described in many different ways, but always refers to the same thing: “theme, thesis, root idea, central idea, goal, aim, driving force, subject, purpose, plan, plot, basic emotion,” as Lajos Egri, a teacher of playwriting, presents in his study *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (2004, p.2). In any of its incarnations, the premise is the unifying element of the script, the viewpoint of the artist through which their chosen subject matter is explored; it is specific to the story the screenwriter is telling. Premise is the core that defines what is necessary for our story to be told and what is excess. “You must have a premise,” Egri writes: “a premise which will lead you unmistakably to the goal your play hopes to reach” (2014, p.6). He suggests that every good play must have a premise consisting three parts: the first revealing character, second the conflict and the third, the resolution of your play. Stating this he reveals that a successful premise forms the thumbnail of any memorable story. He demonstrates this through the premise of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

<i>Great love</i>	<i>defies</i>	<i>even death.</i>
Character	conflict	resolution

Egri analyses Shakespeare’s premise, revealing how it creates the roadmap to the development, necessary characters and required plot for his play:

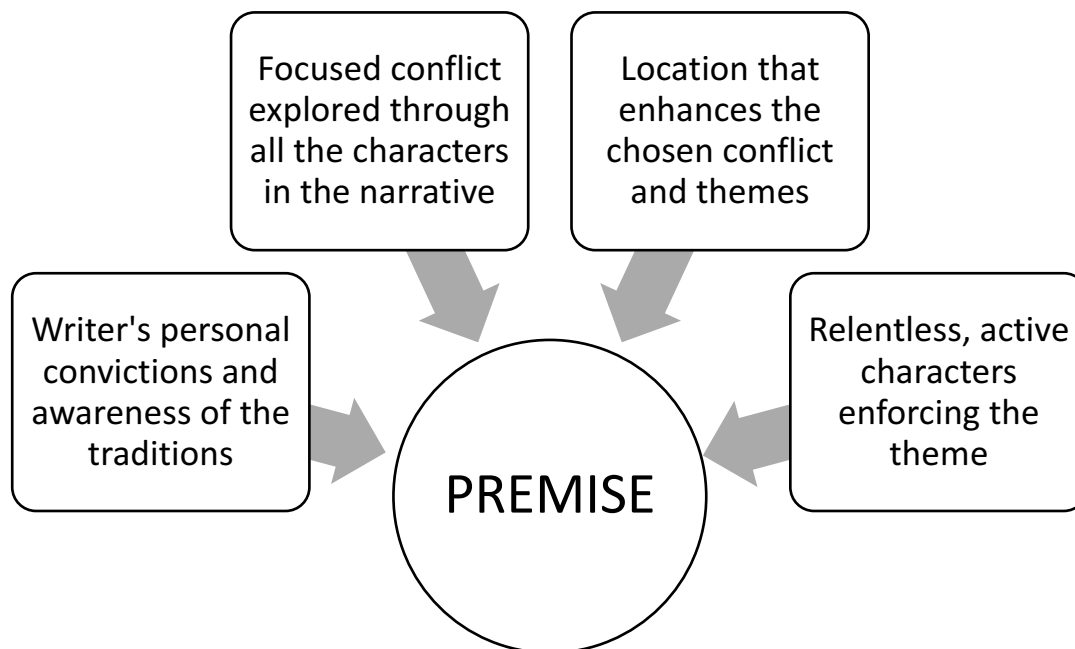
In your premise you must designate exactly how great this love is, show exactly what its destination is, and how far it will go. ... an active premise, so that when you ask what love will defy, it is possible to answer “death,” categorically. As a result, you not only know how far your lovers are willing to go, you also have an inkling as to the kind of characters they are, the characters they must be to carry the premise to its logical conclusion. (2004, p. 14-15)

With the choice of our premise, defining it and developing its conflict and claim on life it makes to the maximum, we create the spine of our whole story: the unifying theme which allows us to leave only what is necessary and come to a logical ending that supports the argument our premise creates. The resolution or climax of the story is also known as the “obligatory scene”, which is something that must happen — it is a moment that is inevitable because it is promised by the premise, a scene that reveals the point of view the writer has for the world, enforcing it through careful selection of characters and scenes that allow us to feel that only this ending can be the satisfying conclusion to our story. Exploring the importance of the resolution, dictated by the premise, Mackendrick describes the obligatory scene:

It is also where character, plot and theme are most clearly integrated. This confrontation is likely to be a high point in the mechanics of action, where principal characters are placed in situations designed to reveal their most significant qualities, their moral weaknesses or strengths, their sympathetic or unsympathetic traits, their true feelings about others. Such showdowns also serve to demonstrate the author’s underlying preoccupations, those themes that give unity and meaning to the story. (2004, p.99).

Egri supports Mackendricks claim, emphasizing that the premise has to be something the storyteller can support unreservedly to be able to prove it (2004, p.15). The point of view, the personality, the values — all the things that make us unique in this world allow us to observe the premises that we feel true. Understanding the power of this, the values that guide us, is just as important to producers as it is for the screenwriters. We must know why we enjoy the stories we enjoy, and why we choose to develop the screenplays we do. As we discovered when considering why stories are told and why we engage with them, most likely these stories enforce our understanding, our view of the world. For a producer to be able to judge and give fair feedback of the screenwriter’s chosen premise, they must be aware of their own convictions. Only by knowing our own view of the world we can know if we can fully support the statement the screenwriter has in the premise they have chosen to prove in their story — and only by truly believing in the chosen point of view we can avoid the story, or our personal feedback, from becoming patronizing and two-dimensional. Something that is forced to prove a point becomes makeshift, a mimic

of something that has been seen, but not truly felt – and this untruthfulness will be noticed by the audience.



“The difference between a live play and a dead one”, Scottish writer and theatre critic William Archer writes in his book *Play-making*, published in 1912: “is that in the former the characters control the plot, while in the latter the plot controls the characters.” This is why a screenwriter and the producer must be aware of their own premise. In the development of the screenplay they must be able to set out to prove their chosen premise, to develop it in a logical and believable manner without undercutting it at any point and be committed to proof the premise by choosing the characters that can carry the story to its inevitable end, and not wander off into topics that are superfluous (Archer, 1912). This is what is meant by the catchphrase “Kill your darlings” – leaving only what is necessary for the promise of the premise, the delivery of this particular story. A well-plotted storyline alone does not create a memorable screenplay – for that to happen we have to know and feel why the story has been told. Only by staying truthful to their premise, through the strong and honest delivery of it through characters that can carry the weight laid by the promise of the premise, can the story find resonance in its audience (Scher, 2011). When the premise is a conviction of its makers, one can avoid it feeling superficial, making it impossible to know where the premise ends and the characters begin (Egri, 2004).

4. Character: The Driving Force of the Screenplay

4.1 What is Character?

Character creates action. It is our driving force of the story. They must have an urgent need to take action to keep our story progressing. Our character is not the protagonist – or any other character in our story – because of their own choice, but because we have in our story given them inner or outer necessity to take action through stakes we have created. They are forced to become the pivotal character who can carry the premise of the story (Egri, 2011, p. 112). A character is the actions they take (Mamet, 1991, p.13). Just as much as we are revealed through what we want we revealed in how we try to achieve it. According to Aristotle character *is* that pursuit of them trying to achieve their want (Mamet, 2007, p. 63). Our actions are in turn influenced by our make-up that derives from three dimensions that create the foundation of a believable character: physiology, sociology and psychology that rounds up the two (Egri, 2004, pp. 34-38)². These three dimensions can be seen in the actions and reactions of our character, not through any exposition that does not forward the story. Egri writes:

The contradictions within a man and the contradictions around him create a decision and a conflict. These in turn force him into a new decision and a new conflict.

Many kinds of pressures are required before a human being can make a single decision, but the three main groups are the physiological, the sociological, and the psychological. From these three forces you can make innumerable combinations. (2004, p. 67)

These different elements in a character allow us to build different kind of personalities. For a good story, we must have a varying orchestration of characters: characters with different social make-up that allow us to build contradictions and conflict that arise from within them and feel then natural and organic.

Good orchestration is one of the reasons for rising conflict in any play. It is possible to choose two liars, two prostitutes, two thieves for one play, but necessarily they will be different in temper, philosophy, and speech. One thief might be considerate, the other ruthless; one could be a coward, the other fearless; one might respect womanhood, the other might despise women. If both have the same temperament, the same

² See Attachment 1 for Egri's Step Outline for Three-Dimensional Character.

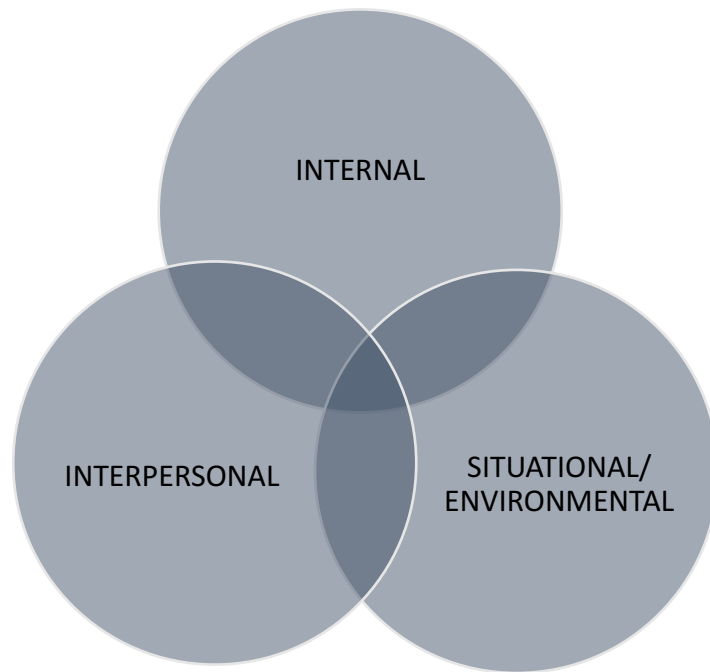
outlook on life, there will be no conflict – and no play. (2004, pp. 118-119)

The orchestration is created with the understanding of the characters three different dimensions. It is important to remember that all characters in the story, not just the protagonist, must be tri-dimensional for us to believe in them. If the supporting characters are not properly developed, they will become flat and then it is not possible to know what they will have at stake and thus to build natural rising conflict that support the protagonist's character arc, which is the change they experience during the course of the story.

The proper orchestration of characters creates unities of opposites. It is important to create characters who cannot compromise from their point of view. Only then can they create and experience conflict. According to Mackendrick a character is "the personification of a point of view" (2004, p. 58). Orchestration of characters is bringing opposing point of views together to create conflict. When drama is about doing and making, this manifests through the character varying motives and temperaments (Mackendrick, 2004, p.74).

4.2 Three main types of conflict for character

Scher has articulated three kind of problems that a character can face in the world of films (2011, pp.47-48): internal, situational and interpersonal. These three types of conflict are all often present in a screenplay, with one type of conflict raising as the main source of antagonism that the protagonist must conquer, providing the writer with a variety of obstacles to overcome during the course of the play.



Internal conflict is the insecurities, uncertainties and character flaws of our protagonist. They are often character traits must be overcome during the course of the screenplay. Situational/environmental conflicts are issues that our character phases in their surroundings such as harsh environment, lack of food and shelter or pressure experienced from the surrounding, wider community. Interpersonal conflict is the conflict presented through the other characters that oppose the protagonist's want or need.

An unsatisfying story is often one where there is not enough at stake for the characters. Without strong characters with opposing desires and social make-up, there cannot be strong conflict and strong conflict can only be when both the protagonist and the antagonist – whether the main source of antagonism internal, interpersonal or situational – are well rounded. Egri describes the necessary balance between the opposing forces:

Both sides are on the verge of losing or winning everything. The very determined set-up between these people creates tension, which, in our lingo foreshadows conflict.

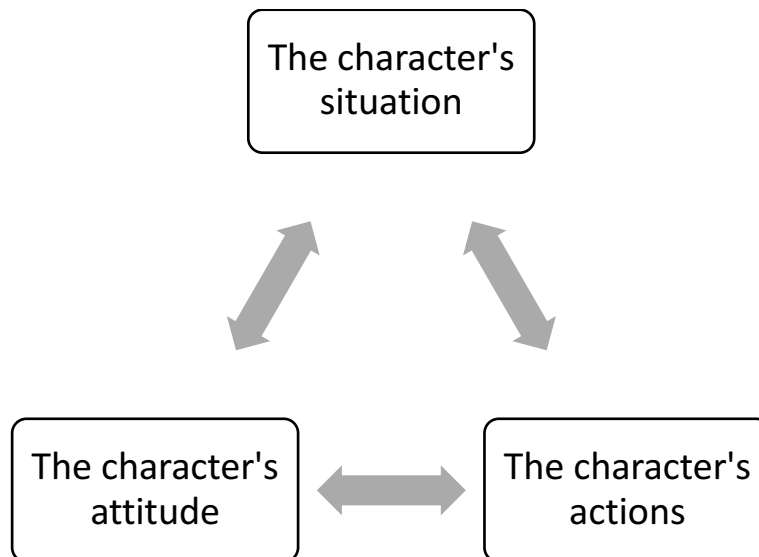
Unrelenting people facing each other in a show-down fight foreshadows merciless conflict to the bitter end. (2004, p. 191)

In a famous quote, Hitchcock claims that our film can only be as successful as our antagonist. Well-chosen unity of opposites allows our protagonist and antagonist be equal forces in a struggle where their character is revealed through conflict and their conflict

will matter to us only because of us understanding their character after we have learned to know what they fear and desire; through what is at stake for them in the resolution.

4.3 Three elements of change for a character

According to Scher, there are a total of three different elements that can potentially be subject to change in the story (2011, p. 77-78). These elements are:



These cover outer, external and internal changes of the character. The outer change is a situation forced upon the character; actions are a response to an outer situation to manage it; attitude is an internal, deeper change within them. Most stories are stories of the character internal change. It is often them overcoming a flaw that allows them to understand that their want would bring them only a situational change, when changing internally will offer them what they need. A character flaw is a major source of internal conflict that should also have an effect on how the external conflict will be heightened before being solved.

5. Building up Tension

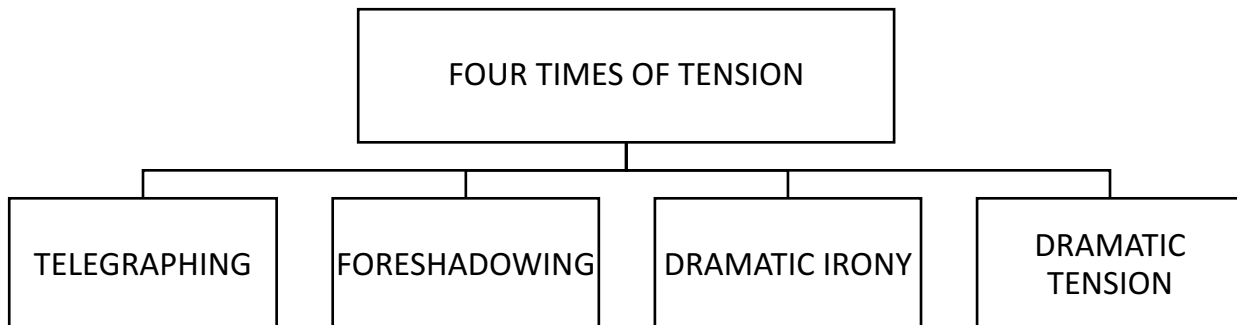
Different sources quote William Archer for the sentence that drama is “anticipation mingled with uncertainty” (Mackendrick, 2004 & Yorke, 2011). Building up tension aims to keep the audience invested in the story – giving us a hint of what is ahead but no knowledge of the outcome. Tension is then the opposite of predictability, despite similar

things build up them both: for something to be predictable we need to understand the logic behind how the events unfold. Tension is created by logical chain of events but avoiding the simplest and easiest routes. It is showing us that something is built without showing us the whole plan from the beginning. According to Archer, tension is created in the mind of the audience by making them imagine the possible outcomes and wishing to see the consequences. “A great part of the secret of dramatic architecture lies in the word ‘tension,’” he writes: “To engender, maintain, suspend, heighten and resolve a state of tension--that is the main object of the dramatist’s craft.” (Archer, 1912). Archer points out that any tension in a story is tension in the audience’s mind: having a high stakes scene for a character, putting them in higher jeopardy has only one aim – to make the audience more invested in the outcome, burning to know what happens next. To him, drama is the art of crisis – and crisis heightens the tension experienced by the audience.

A play is a more or less rapidly-developing crisis in destiny or circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, clearly furthering the ultimate event. The drama may be called the art of crises, as fiction is the art of gradual developments. It is the slowness of its processes which differentiates the typical novel from the typical play.
(Archer, 1912)

Each crisis presented is a chance for a new route of action. Scher describes this by stating that plot points are places when the rules of the game are changed (2011, p.66). We might have first believed that Cinderella simply wishes to attend the Royal Ball – but there a Prince will fall in love with her, and the stakes are now higher than they were before. Every scene has to plausibly build on the ones that came before it, creating new probabilities of what might follow. By carefully considering the premise, the beginning of our story as well as the ending, we can see what route we must take, creating a sense of inevitability – or as the Greeks called it, fate. Successfully creating tension is the art of making the inevitable outcome seem equally as likely as other conceivable endings, when actually, none of the other endings would have been as satisfying as the one delivered. This can be done only by making sure that the audience identifies and deeply cares for our characters. When our protagonist, supporting characters and the antagonist matter to our audience with their hopes and fears, we will care for the outcome. The matters they fight for must be of life and death to our characters, either metaphorically or literally.

5.1 Four times of tension



The above visualization of the four times of tension allow us to consider the story from the perspective of the audience. These are practically ways to make the stakes higher and more urgent. Telegraphing means that we are given a timeline: at a certain time, something important will happen and we have time only till then before a disaster of some sort strikes. This adds a sense of urgency to the story (e.g. the spell will break at midnight). Foreshadowing shows that something is going to happen, but we remain uncertain what happens then. It is promised to the audience, but the effect kept delayed. This effect is also known as the *dangling cause* (e.g. a threat or a promise). Dramatic irony is when the audience knows more than the characters do, creating a new meaning to what is being seen (e.g. a character in grave danger yet completely unaware of it) and making us aware of the question: “Who knows what and when?”. Dramatic tension is the active questions raised by the story: will the characters get what they want and what they need? Each one of these examples allows us to consider how the stakes can be made even higher, the obstacles created bigger and more difficult to conquer, adding urgency and threat. By playing with the different tensions and ideas, building up expectations and then surprising the audience by aversion and changing the point-of-view, the story is felt and experienced and keeps the audience interested.

5.2 Inevitability of the resolution

A tension builds up to keep the audience interested in the outcome of the story. Mamet writes: “Every turn takes us to the next, That’s why it’s a good story.” (1991, p.95) It is

just as important as creating the tension is to make the wait worthwhile – to create the feeling that this is exactly how everything was supposed to pan. Equally important is to create a sense of uncertainty and surprise with the turns of the events – for a story must be surprising for it to be worth the audience’s time. The audience stay interested in our story as long as the protagonist is trying achieve their want or their need but they will immediately lose our interest if they feel that the film-maker is not showing them the story rather trying to influence the (Mamet, 1991, p.14). This can be avoided by keeping the premise clearly in mind, making certain that the character developments and scenes follow logical transitions – no steps can be skipped – as well as making sure we do not allow the characters to get through their conflict too easily. There must always be a chance for everything to go completely wrong.

The two key elements that we have learned regarding tension from the writings of Aristotle, Mamet suggests, are the necessity of *fear* and *pity*, that audience must experience during the drama. Mamet clarifies that fear and pity mean *surprise* and *inevitability* (1991, pp. 96-97). The experience through the feelings of fear and pity for the protagonist audience has for the protagonist causes also the feeling that all this “could happen to us” and that is created by making sure the story follows a logical pattern. We must be able to identify with the characters goals and feel like there is no other possible satisfactory ending to this story. In retrospect, we must feel that the antagonistic forces our character faced during the course of the story held a true danger. We must have felt truly concerned for the ending to feel joy over the final victory or sadness for the final loss. Mamet writes:

The audience wants to be piqued, to be misled, to be disappointed at times, so that it can, finally, be fulfilled. The audience therefore needs the second act to end with a question.

This is fine for the audience, as they do not need to know, at this point, what the answer to that question is. But the artist must. (2007, p.32)

The need for a dramatic structure is inbuilt for us – it is a natural way for us to order information. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. An event takes place, we explain what happens in its due course and what is the final outcome. We want to be misled along the way, be

surprised, and at the end of it, feel satisfaction. The story begins with the first line uttered, builds up with tension as we learn how everything is at stake in the outcome and then come to the “point of concentration toward which the maximum expectation is aroused.” (Egri, 2004, p.247). This is the moment where we have to proof our premise.

David Mamet named his 2007 book handling the structure and expectations aroused in the audience *Three uses of the knife: On the nature and purpose of drama*. Throughout reading his book one wonders where such an original name comes from. It foreshadows with its name, raising curiosity: why a knife is mentioned? He answers the expectation, quoting an American folk and blues singer, Huddie Ledbetter (1888-1949):

You take a knife, you use it to cut the bread, so you'll have strength to work; you use it to shave, so you'll look nice for your lover; on discovering her with another, you use it to cut out her lying heart. (2007, p.58)

Through the point of view of the knife, he has presented us a story with a beginning, middle and end – thesis, antithesis, synthesis, including background, build-up, change, motivation and resolution. Scher writes that making it possible for the audience to understand how the situation has affected the characters, we can understand their decisions and actions and anticipate the outcome. “Once there is an outcome to anticipate,” she writes: “there is a story in which the audience becomes engaged. Without consequences, it may be just an account of an event.” (2011, p. 26). By keeping everything in the events and characters included in the story focused on the central question presented, the claim that the premise makes, and consistently sticking to it, focusing on the most significant moments, we can keep the dramatic arc of the story satisfying. Building on beats, moments of small change in the scene, to scenes and sequences, we arrive to a resolution where our characters have experienced a complete change.

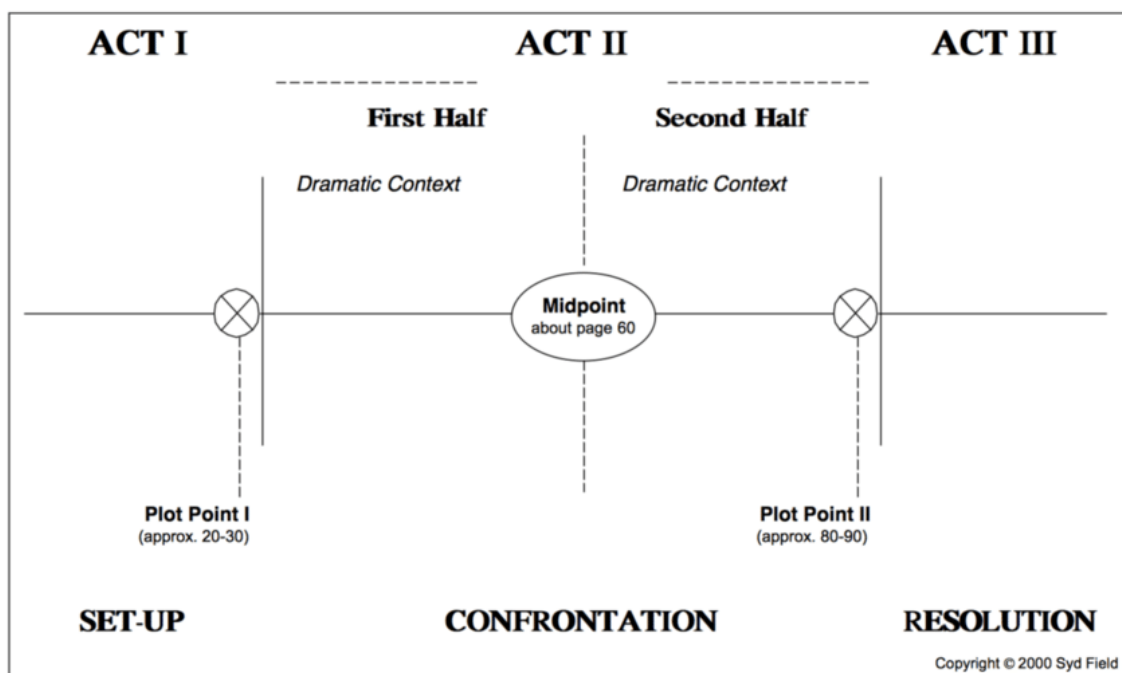
6. The Common Presentations of Dramatic Structure

A well-chosen premise gives us a roadmap that reveals what the breaks into Act I, Act II and Act III known as presented in *The Syd Field Paradigm* (Field, 2003), *The Hero's Journey* (Vogler, 2007) and *The Beat Sheet* (Snyder, 2005). These breakdowns are included here

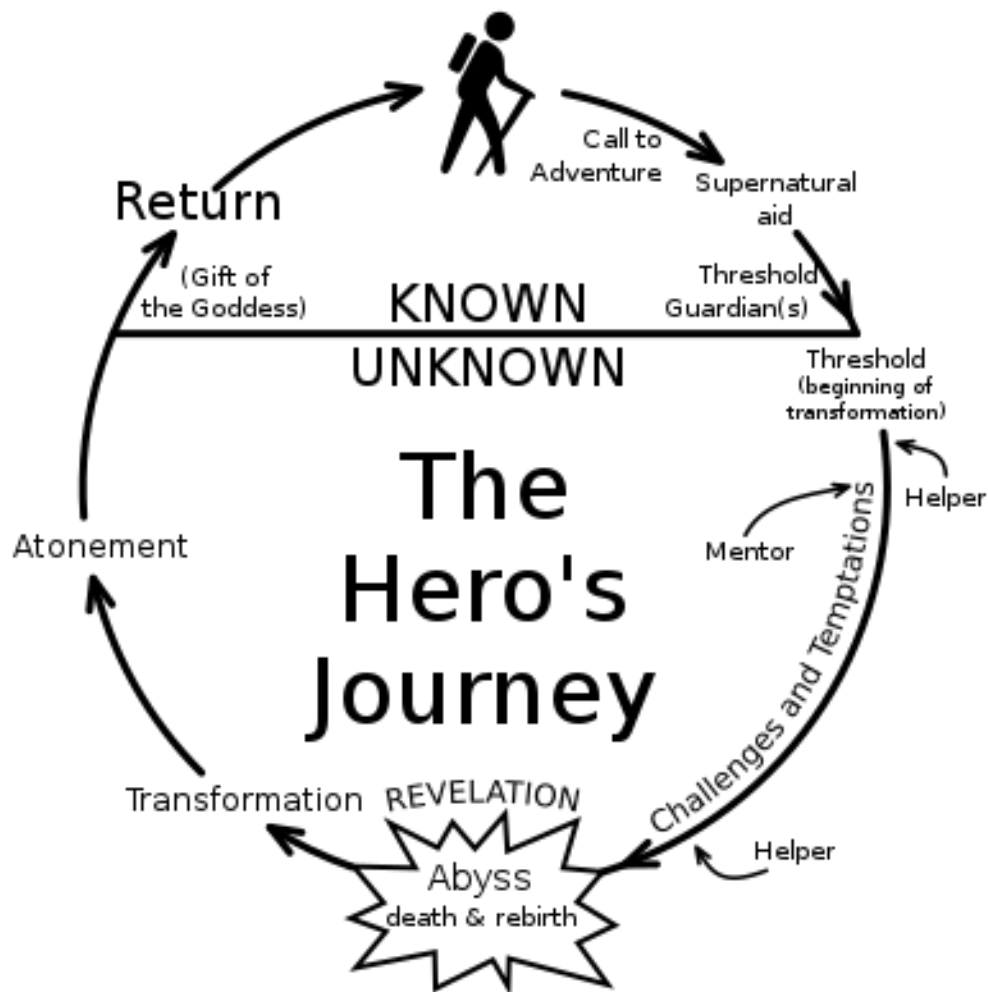
to support the command of dramatic structure which is at the heart of developing character, scene/sequence and tension in the screenplay. The key to the successful use of these representations is considering how these methods help us to understand and heighten the conflict through the chosen premise. Most useful these when considered not how to put our character through the suitable turns in the story but rather carefully consider how these representations reveal our characters growing awareness of their want and need. They are aids showing us the necessary changes that our protagonist must undergo through the course of our story. The opposing forces our characters encounter are there not to be obstacles for obstacle's sake, but to allow our character to grow through the conflicts they overcome. Furthermore, the conflict they must overcome is one that will fulfil the promise of the premise, the necessary lesson they must learn to be able to go through the change they need to for the resolution of the story.

The producer should refer to these paradigms to analyze any possible problems in the screenplay if the script does not manage to build the heightening stakes and tension in a natural, exciting manner. It is important to remember that the producer's major role in the screen development is to analyze possible issues before they happen - and for this purpose these presentations of the dramatic arc offer us a good source of reference.

6.1 Visual presentation: *The Syd Field Paradigm*



6.2 Visual presentation: Christopher Vogler's *The Hero's Journey*



6.3 Blake Snyder's *Beat Sheet*

1. Opening image
2. Theme Stated
3. Set-up
4. Catalyst
5. Debate
6. Break into Two
7. B-Story
8. Fun and Games
9. Midpoint
10. Bad Guys Close In
11. All is Lost

12. Dark Night of the Soul
13. Break into Three
14. Finale
15. Final Image

6.4 Transitions

These presentations exist to make sure that the character arc follows a logical progression. These portray the small conflicts that will into bigger conflicts so that the audience is emotionally ready to have the final conflict, the obligatory resolution to the story, presented to them and that they can believe in the outcome. These smaller conflicts are there to show the minute changes in the mindset of our character that prepare them to grow in a “slow, even tempo” (Egri, 2004, pp. 135-136). Drama is conflict and conflict is sustained through growth (2004, p. 122). Looking at these paradigms does not tell us how to write a great story, but they help us to make sure we allow our protagonist to change in a complete, believable character arc, where rising conflict prepares them to prove the promise of the premise.

7. Giving Feedback: Coaching the Writer

Giving or receiving feedback is never easy. People are afraid of being judged and have inbuilt need for validation and acceptance. When a producer is giving feedback to a screenwriter, they must be aware of the power balance between them. Feedback should not be something that is forced down. Feedback will be more effective when it comes from someone who has earned the respect through their character, not because of their title. This means that preparing for giving feedback should focus as much on the way the feedback is delivered as it does on the subject the feedback is given off.

7.1 Regarding Trust

The saying has it: “Trust takes years to build, seconds to break, and forever to repair.” Trust between the person who is giving and receiving feedback is fundamental for creating a good relationship. Campbell et al. (2006) specifically focus on the importance of trust when considering how to prepare for giving feedback and have a good coaching

relationship. The focus of coaching is to help other person learn and grow through trust and encouragement. Because of the importance of trust, they warn against any attempts of manipulation, as people do not notice this easily and it endangers the trust built (pp.4-6). Griffiths supports this statement in her work regarding script development, writing that the script editor's role is to leave their own ego behind and help the writer to connect with their intended audience by providing analytical feedback where they consider the problems and achievements of the screenplay and why and why not certain areas of the screenplay work. In order to do that, they must remember that the aim of script development is to help the writer to improve their screenplay without causing them stress or confusion (2015, pp. 13-15). The level of intimacy and style of the feedback is dependent on the people who share it, but generally script developers are encouraged to keep their tone as neutral as possible, which helps the focusing on the issues and strengths of the screenplay rather than nuances or personal preferences. Campbell et al. (2006) refer to a formula created by Maister, Green and Galford to identify the key factors that form trustworthiness, known as the Trust Equation.

$$\text{Trustworthiness} = \frac{\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Intimacy}}{\text{Self} - \text{Orientation}}$$

Campbell et al. open the terms used in the equation:

Credibility is a mix of how accurately you give information and how honest and forthcoming you seem.

Reliability is the extent to which you do what you say you will do in the time you promised.

Intimacy refers to the comfort level you create for discussing difficult topics, ...

Self-orientation relates to the balance you maintain between your level of personal motivation - your own interests and agenda - and the level of concern and focus you have for the other person. (2006, p.14)

The Trust Equation supports the understanding of how much feelings and actions affect our feelings on any given feedback. Achieving the level of trustworthiness through actions

and manners is equally important in script development as the educated analysis of the screenplay that is being worked on. Despite our stories being ones of conflict developing a screenplay should not be one. Both the producer and the screenwriter should consider how between themselves they can achieve trustworthiness. The relationship should be mutual, for both bring to the table a different set of skills, understanding and life-experiences. However, only one of them is there to write the story and a producer should nurture the development of the story and watch out for micromanaging the screenplay in the writer's behalf. A major part of this is regarding to self-orientation - you need to be able to direct your attention to the other person to help them feel valued and heard. If the focus is solely on yourself, your feelings, thoughts and personal experience the other person will feel insignificant and unwanted. This can be best avoided by making sure to show appreciation. Recognizing and acknowledging the hard work the other party are major components of showing appreciation (Campbell et al., 2006, p.71) which in turn will help with the motivation needed for further rewrites. It is important to remember that just as much as script development is about making the story better, it is about encouraging the storyteller to keep working on it. One easy and often undervalued way of creating that trust could be just two, simple, straightforward questions:

- How are you today?
- How would you like your feedback delivered?

This is here just to remind that every person, every situation and every feedback delivered is unique. By appreciating this simple fact -showing genuine interest in the screenwriter, their wellbeing and a will to support them in your best manner when developing their script, recognizing that they have faced their own difficulties and uncertainties when working on the screenplay - a major chunk of the problems of developing a screenplay have already avoided.

7.2 Considering clarity in feedback

1. Make sure you know your genre! Knowing the emotional territory helps you to keep your feedback relevant and on to the point (Scher, 2011, p.14). It is important to

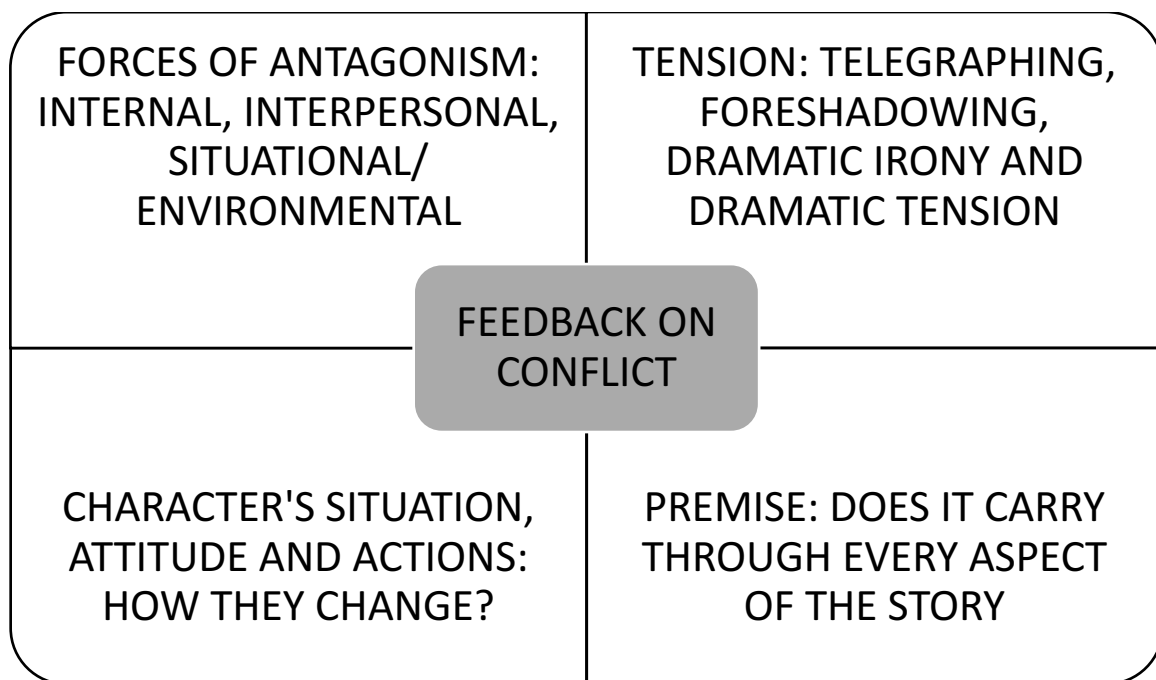
recognize which conventions have to be followed to keep the story consistent and believable and which ones can be broken to make it more unique.

2. Make sure you understand the meaning of the story. The premise does not need to be plainly stated, but it has to be clear. The stories audience remembers are the ones that have a clear central statement that has been carefully and plausibly covered by the screenwriter in their work (Scher, 2011, p.5)
3. Is there anything in the screenplay that creates confusion or undermines the meaning/premise of the screenplay? (Scher, 2011, p.56)
4. Provide clear, and concise notes of the screenplay. Do not muddle your meaning by over-explaining but do also critically consider the things you wish to raise (Griffiths, 2015). If you have an issue with something, consider what might be causing this feeling or concern you have. Yorke writes (2013, p.73): “Professional screenplays have a quality in common with good journalism: they use the minimum number of words to communicate the maximum information.” This great advice regarding screenplays applies also to writing good feedback.
5. You do not have to give feedback about everything. Give feedback only when you believe it is relevant and necessary for the development of the story (minimum words for maximum impact).
6. Do not write, or rewrite, the screenplay. That is for the screenwriter to do. Unless you have agreed that you would cowrite the screenplay, leave the writing for the screenwriter. Giving feedback, being the fresh eyes and encouraging the screenwriter are all important tasks in their own right.

8. Conclusion

Learning any new skill can be a daunting experience. The creative producer has to master several new and old skills during the production of a film. By making sure they understand the demands of creating a believable, emotionally satisfying screenplay, they avoid several of the issues that rise from a poorly developed screenplay. The different opinions and ideas that come in throughout the development have to be carefully considered. The producer is the one who must protect the screenwriter’s visions and keep it clearly in mind why this specific story was first chosen for development.

As we have demonstrated, screenwriting manuals agree that at the heart of storytelling is drama and drama is conflict. Conflict is what allows us to reveal character, it urges our protagonist on, allow the audience to identify with their struggles and at the end, feel satisfied to know the conflict led to a conclusion which at the same time feels unseen and inevitable. The producer can look the development of the screenplay from a different perspective than the creator, but to be able to support them in their work, they must understand the demands of creating these different types of conflicts.



They must be aware of the conflicts that most resonate with them, for that will help them to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as a creative. Not every story for every producer to tell. Being aware of what kind of conflict is the one that they themselves find the strongest and most fascinating allow them to give deep and meaningful input to the development of the story - and through understanding, avoid patronizing or overflowing feedback. This allows them to learn how to articulate their own thoughts to the screenwriter as clearly and effectively as they wish to have the final screenplay read.

Attachment 1: Egri's Step Outline for Tri-Dimensional Character

PHYSIOLOGY

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Height and weight
4. Color of hair, eyes, skin
5. Posture
6. Apperance: good-looking, over- or underweight, clean, neat, pleasant, untidy. Shape of head, face, limbs.
7. Defects: deformities, abnormalities, birthmarks. Diseases.
8. Heredity

SOCIOLOGY

1. Class: lower, middle, upper.
2. Occupation: type of work, hours of work, income.
3. Education: amount, kind of schools, marks, favorite subjects, poorest subjects, aptitudes.
4. Home life: parents living, earning power, orphan, parents separated or divorced, parents' habits, parents' mental development, parent's vices, neglect. Character's marital status.
5. Religion
6. Race, nationality
7. Place of community: leader among friends, clubs, sports.
8. Political affiliations
9. Amusements, hobbies: books, newspapers, magazines he reads.

PSYCHOLOGY

1. Sex life, moral standards
2. Personal premise, ambition
3. Frustrations, chief disappointments
4. Temperament: choleric, easygoing, pessimistic, optimistic
5. Attitude toward life: resigned, militant, defeatist
6. Complexes: obsessions, inhibitions, superstitions, phobias
7. Extrovert, introvert, ambivert
8. Abilities: languages, talents
9. Qualities: imagination, judgment, taste, poise
10. I.Q.

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